The Weekly Caucasian.

WASHINGTON'S WEDDING.

BY JOHN ESTEN COOKE.

It is now some years since I visited a venerable edifice intimately connected with the life of a great man—old St. Peter's church, in New Kent county, Virginia, where Washington was married.

Let us leave for a moment the bustle, turmoil and "rush," of the Iron Age, and go back to the last century, when life was more deliberate, solid, and picturesque. The old church of which I speak takes you easily back, as you gaze at it; and there is the added interest of its association with the nuptials of Washington.

Old St. Peter's was built as far back as the year 1703, and is a long, low building, of "sun-dried brick," brought over from England, as was then the habit, with a steep roof, and walls embrowned by age. A square tower rises above the open vestibule, on a level with the ground, and in this tower is the vestry room, to which you ascend by a lofty flight of ancient and creaking steps. Crowning the tower is a sort of steeple, surmounted by crossing rods, bearing the letters, 'N. S. E. W.,' and on the summit of all is a small portion of an old weather-cock, which probably veered in the winds of the last century.

The surroundings of the time honored edifice are as antique as the building, which stands on its wooded knoll, with the sturdy air of a veteran, careless of "time and tide." On the bricks are carved names and dates by hands that have long crumbled. One of these dates is 1739. On a great tombstone beneath the oriel window, walled up, for some reason, is a coat-of-arms, raised in bass relief—a shield, with a "lone star" upon it; above, a knight's vizard, with the coronet—of a duke or marquis apparently—encircling it; and surmounting all, the grinning head of a wolf. On this stone, dark and durable as was the marble of the epoch, is cut the date "1716." Not a tracery has grown dim, not a letter or figure is indistinct. The wolf's tongue lolls out fiercely; his eyes glare; his teeth snarl. The rain and snow and sunshine have fallen for a century and a half on the knightly helmet and the head of the wolf—and neither rain, snow, nor sunshine have affected the iron surface.

These objects take you back to a remote period, very unlike the present, when buildings, tombstones, and all things, seem constructed of transient materials. Another memorial of old times is the grove of great oaks around the church. What picturesque scenes these must have witnessed! Beneath their spreading boughs, generation after generation, rolled the chariots of the old-time Virginians, drawn by their four horses, and containing the squire, his wife, and maidens and children, attending church. To those boughs were tethered the bridles of thorough-bred horses, ridden by gallant youths. Yonder the chariots discharged their burdens—the pompous old lord of the manor, the good dame, his wife, and the little beauty, their daughter, in her great hooped dress, square-cut bodice, powdered hair, and red heeled shoes, which she displays as she raises her silk dress and scarlet "petticoat," as they called it then. You may see her still, in imagination, as she smiles and nods, slaying, with her bright eyes, the youths in embroidered coats, long waistcoats, and ruffles, who hasten to assist her, and contend for the touch of the small hand.

All that has passed away; the youths and maidens are long dead. The parson no longer sweeps down the vestry stairs, or thunders or drones in his high, tub-shaped pulpit above the listeners in the lofty pews. Squire and dame and parson and gallant lover and little beauty live only in the memory of the great oaks, which waved above them, wave still, and will probably rustle their leaves in the winds of another century.

Such is and was old St. Peter's Church—an interesting relic, to-day, of a time that is long dead; interesting, more than all, as I have said, as having been the scene of Washington's wedding.

The incident which led to that event is worth narrating, and is something of a comedy. I hope, in relating it, I shall not be charged with "irreverence" to the famous bridegroom. He was a man of lofty pride, august dignity—a very grand type of manhood. But he was a man, not a demi god, and "fell in love" at least twice in his life, like the humblest of his species. This was his second love, and something of romance was connected with the origin of the affair.

It was in the spring of 1758. Mr. Custis, a planter residing at his estate called "The White House," was riding out one morning, when he met, coming from the northward, a young gentleman of military appearance, excellently mounted, and accompanied by a gaunt old servant or sergeant, who rode respectfully a few paces behind his master. The new-comers were Colonel George Washington, on his way from Winchester to Williamsburg, and his attendant, Bishop, formerly Braddock's body-servant, now his own.

Washington was twenty-five at that time, and a young man of great sedateness and dignity. He was in chief command on the frontier, and saw or thought little of the fair sex. But, on this spring morning of 1758, his "time had come."

Mr. Custis greeted him, and invited him to stop at the White House. He would do so with pleasure, but it would be for half an hour only. His business was pressing; he must hasten on to see his excellency at Williamsburg; and conversing, they rode back, and reached the White House. Here Washington dismounted, and delivered his horse to Bishop, with orders to await him there; he would continue his journey in half an hour. Bishop saluted gravely, with hand raised to his hat; his master entered the house; and the half an hour passed—the old servant waiting patiently.

His master did not, however, make his appearance. The event was unheard of. Col. Washington was the soul of punctuality; he was on pressing public business; what could be the meaning of this strange, unwonted delay?

An hour—two hours—passed. Colonel Washington did not reappear. But a servant came out, and delivered an order from him to the motionless old body-guard. He would conduct the horses to the stables; his master would dine, and possibly spend the night with Mr. Custis. Bishop obeyed—the world was clearly coming to an end!—and Colonel Washington was the guest of the owner of the White House.

On the next morning, Bishop, in obedience to orders to that effect, saddled the horses, and waited before the door for the colonel, who designed setting out, he said, immediately. An hour passed; the colonel did not appear. Two hours afterward, there were still no sign of him. Then the servant came again, and directed the horses to be led back; Colonel Washington would remain to dinner, and then continue his journey.

The day was far spent when the young soldier made his appearance, and vaulted into the saddle. Tall, vigorous, graceful, and with a certain loftiness of port, even then distinguishable, he was a gallant looking cavalier—one whom any woman might admire.

One was gazing at him through the window—a young lady of about his own age, with rosy cheeks, bright eyes, hair carried back from the forehead, and a neck, resembling snow, above the square cut bodice. The young colonel reined in his spirited horse, nearly throwing him back upon his haunches, made a courteous salute with his right hand (it was nearly the attitude of a bronze statue of him afterward), and galloped away, thinking, probably, of the bright eyes and lips.

"Colonel George Washington, of Mount Vernon," has seen for the first time Mrs. Martha Custis, the beautiful young widow, who a year afterward was to become his wife.

Tradition relates that the ceremony took place in old St. Peter's Church, which we have referred to in the beginning of this sketch. The scene was a briliant one, and may interest the reader. It was in January, 1759. The Rev. Dr. Mossom, parson of the parish, attended in full canonicals, and the pair advanced, followed by a bevy of beauties and their groomsmen. Washington was clad in a suit of blue-and-silver, lined with silk; his waist-coat was embroidered; his knee and shoe buckles were of gold; his hair was powdered, and he wore a dress sword. The bride was dressed in white satin, with rich point-lace ruffles; had pearl ornaments in her hair; pearl necklace, earrings and bracelets; white satin shoes, with high heels, and diamond buckles, and was followed, as has been said, by an array of beautiful and richly dressed girls, leaning upon the arms of groomsmen, in costume as imposing. The vice-regal Governor of Virginia, in a suit of scarlet, embroidered with gold, with huge bag wig and dress sword, was seen in the midst of a number of officers of the English army and navy, and a great crowd of what were then called the "gentry," friends and relations of the bride and groom—filled the church, all intent upon the "interesting ceremony." One personage has been forgotton—Bishop, the faithful old body servant. He, too, was present—tall, gaunt, solemn—in scarlet, with huge horseman's boots. With folded arms, and much emotion in his aged face, he gazed at the ceremony with the rest.

It soon ended, and the brilliant crowd flowed forth from the old church. Tradition relates that the bride and as many of her fair attendants as could do so, entered the great chariot which rolled off drawn by its six spirited horses; while the bridegroom, fonder of riding horseback, mounted the splendid English charger bequeathed to him by Braddock, and cantered after the coach, attended by a number of gallant youths.

Such was that picturesque scene in the life of the venerable "Father of his Country." We see so much of the great soldier, statesman and ruler, that it is pleasant to catch a glimpse of the lover and bridegroom. Why not? One phase of the individual—the public and official phase—present only the profile; to obtain the full likeness, the other phase must be delineated, too. The unreasonable theory has been to regard George Washington as an abstraction of patriotism and virtue, when he was a man like other men, with strong passions and human sympathies and infirmities. The result has been that he has failed in a measure to impress *the heart.* Men admire, but are chilled by him—by that grand bronze statue under which a heart never beat. Such an idea is a fallacy. Few human beings have ever felt more deeply than Washington. He loved warmly, and, if he did not hate bitterly it was because his moral nature revolted from hatred, the sister of injustice, and his immense self-control enabled him to rule himself.

But this moral discourse is apart from the aim of the little sketch here presented. If that sketch be without "historic importance," it may claim, perhaps the merit of being characteristic. The contrast at least is something. Few men are left of that man's mould, and our weddings to-day are prosaic. Blue and silver coats, with red silk lining, are not the fashion. Six horse chariots have disapeared. The dress swords have rusted away. All that brilliant life of the past has faded into the unpicturesque nineteenth century, and the poetry, splendor and romance, have all turned to prose.

But the great oaks and the old church, lost in the wilds of New Kent, are still there. Beneath the trees flashed that brilliant *cortege* of old days—in that building George Washington placed the ring on the finger of his bride. All has passed away now; the stately and beautiful figures have long lain down in their tombs, but the stubborn trunks, with their leafy masses, and the church and tombstones, with their ancient inscriptions remain to recall the life of the past.

Shortly before his death Wilkes Booth deposited $3,000 in a bank at Montreal. None of his family would draw this deposit, and it still remains to his credit. Neither his mother nor brother will receive it, though offered to them several times, and it must eventually go to the British crown.

This story comes from California: The Rev. C. G. Ames preaches at San Jose, but, being absent on furlough for his health, Mrs. Ames fills the pulpit very acceptable in his absence. On one recent Sabbath she got up in the morning and prepared breakfast, washed and dressed her baby, dressed her little daughter for Sabbath School, put her baby to sleep, and sat down and reviewed her sermon before it was time to take the cars for church, when she went to the place of worsip and preached, to the entire satisfaction of a large and critical audience."

Gen. Beauregard sailed for France on Wednesday, on the steamer Villa de Paris.

On the 14th inst., A. L. Dyke, a train boy on the Kansas Pacific Railroad, started from Kansas City, Mo. for England, in obedience to a summons by telegraph. The dispatch stated that a very wealthy uncle of the boy had died, leaving him his entire property, valued at $1,150,000. The boy started for New York, and will take the first steamer for England. He was in the St. Nicholas Hotel for a short time preceding his departure. He was excited and nervous, although he attemped to conceal his agitation.